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ABSTRACT

This digest identifies three major enrollment trends presently affecting community colleges. The three types of students--dual credit, reverse transfer, and job retraining--are likely to continue to increase in number in the near future. Dual-credit, in which secondary school students enroll in courses that receive both high school and college credit, is increasing across the nation. Research by Andrews (2001) shows these programs were in 48 states by 2001, as well as showing them to be successful in providing academic stimulus for junior and senior secondary school students. Reverse transfer students are students who attend community college after having attended a four-year university. They are either completers or non-completers of a four-year degree program. Degree completers are more likely to be seeking career skills at the community college. New federal and state legislation helped stimulate the growth of community college workforce retraining programs in the mid- to late-1990s. The Welfare to Work Programs are examples of the effects of legislation on community college curricula. These programs include short-term job training and retraining as a way to move welfare recipients off of welfare and into the workforce. Job training will continue to be a necessity with ongoing shifts in the U.S. economy, shifting of jobs to the international market, and the need for businesses to keep up to date with technological change. (Contains 10 references.) (NB)

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Digest

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Enrollment Trends in Community Colleges

By Hans A. Andrews

Community colleges are rapidly adapting their policies, procedures and services to accommodate new and growing groups of students. New community college student enrollment groups include (1) *dual-credit* and *dual-enrollment* students taking college courses during their last two years of high school; (2) *reverse transfer* students, both those who have attended a senior college without completing a degree, and those who have completed one or more degrees; and (3) students needing or wishing to obtain *job retraining*. Serving these students offers community colleges a way to meaningfully address some major educational and employment concerns that have arisen today.

This digest presents key information and current research on these three expanding categories of students enrolling in American community colleges at the beginning of the 21st century.

Dual-Credit and Dual-Enrollment Students

Recently community colleges have begun to expand programs in which high school students, mostly juniors and seniors, take college level courses. The senior year of high school has been documented in a number of studies as a "waste of time" for many students (Kirst, 2001). The dual-credit movement is offering secondary schools a viable option to motivate and challenge their students in their last years of high school.

Andrews (2001) described these student enrollees as follows:

> Dual-Credit Students: Secondary school students enrolled in courses that receive both college credit and credit toward meeting secondary school requirements for graduation.
>
> Dual (Concurrent)-Enrolled Students: Secondary school students enrolled in college courses while continuing to be enrolled as high school students. The college courses are only used for college credit.

Community colleges assess these students for proper course placement prior to enrollment. Students often need to obtain support from parents, secondary school counselors and administrators, and full-time high school and college faculty prior to enrollment. Courses are offered on the community college campus or at the high school. Full-time college faculty, adjunct (part-time) faculty and selected high school faculty teach the courses using college syllabi and textbooks.

Bryant (2000) reported high school dual-enrollment increasing nationally from 96,913 in 1993 to 123,039 in 1995. A study by Oregon's Joint Boards of Education in 1997 found 31 states involved in dual-enrollment programs (Oregon University System, 1999). Andrews' (2001) research found this number had grown to 48 states by 2001. Andrews and Barnett (2002) reported a 406% growth in dual-credit and dual-enrollment students between 1996-97 and 2000-01 in Illinois. Dual-enrollments may be approaching 500,000 in 2003 with very high program growth reported in Missouri, Oklahoma, Virginia, Washington, Florida and several other states.

State programs have a variety of titles: *Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act* in Michigan and Ohio, *Kansas Challenge to Secondary School Pupils Act* in Kansas, and *Fifth-Year High School Program for Advanced Students* in Colorado. These programs exist in some of the states that have legislation that defines the rules for both secondary schools and colleges for enrolling dual-credit students. Missouri is an example of a state that responded to growth in dual-enrollment by developing statewide guidelines for dual-credit students. This was needed to ensure transferability of dual-credits earned at the community college to state universities and 4-year colleges.

Reverse Transfer Students

Undergraduate "reverse transfer" students attend community colleges for two major reasons. One group is "non-completers" of baccalaureate degrees and the other is "completers" of one or more university degrees. Degree completers are much more likely to be seeking career skills for new jobs or trying to improve their skills in a current job than are non-completers.

Non-Completers

A study by Winter, et al., (2001) found that non-completers' goals were to complete an associate degree, to improve their basic skills, to take courses to transfer back to a university and to try to improve their grade point averages. The non-completers averaged 29 years of age. Many of these students were not serious, or socially or academically ready their first time in college. Some left for family-related reasons. Academic failure, loss of funding, and a lack of continued family support previously led to the dismissal or withdrawal of many of these students from their original university.

Completers

Completers usually enrolled to obtain career skills for new jobs or to improve their skills in a current job. They attended colleges close to home and were older with an average age of 37 (Winter, et al., 2001). Further describing degree completers, Reusch (2000) in a study of 221 students from six community colleges in Illinois found that degree completers were typically male, white, and married and averaged 38 years

of age. They had waited an average of 11 years from baccalaureate degree completion before enrolling at the community colleges, and enrolled for employment-related reasons in such fields as computer-related or health service-related programs. Female students tended to enroll more frequently in health service programs.

Concerns have been raised about whether colleges should accept degree completer reverse transfer students. Budgets, and therefore access, are tightening up as state and federal governments are running heavy deficits and are cutting college state support dollars. Colleges may be forced to decide if allowing degree completers access jeopardizes access to students who have not yet had the opportunity to enroll in college programs.

Job Retraining Students

Community colleges became highly involved with workforce retraining during the mid- to late-1990s. New federal legislation and federal and state financial support helped stimulate this growth beyond what had been attempted in previous federal and state supported programs. One example of legislation that has affected community college enrollment growth is Welfare to Work programs, which can include short-term job training and retraining as a way to move welfare recipients off of welfare and to work.

Job retraining has expanded in recent years as more American companies have moved manufacturing jobs to Mexico, China and other foreign countries. Students often find themselves training for positions that are significantly lower in pay and benefits than ones they left. Those laid off from lower-paying jobs often find they are able to command semi-professional and professional pay rates after completing high demand career retraining programs. Accelerated growth in job retraining is the result of companies sending their employees back to the classroom to learn the latest in technological developments. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) reported that in 1998 this type of retraining amounted to $63 billion dollars annually (Workforce Economics, 2001).

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors (1995) examined changes that were taking place in the country because of population shifts, growth, and workforce needs. Projected trends were: (1) the labor force would incorporate more women, minorities, and older workers; (2) continuing developments in technology requiring on-going education; and that (3) the community college role in retraining would continue to be substantial.

The state of Washington's Worker Retraining report (2000) presents an excellent example of the impact of workforce retraining. Over 44,000 unemployed and displaced workers since 1993 were served at 34 state community colleges. The state legislature allocated over $27 million for classes and assistance to the workers during training at the community colleges. Over 22,000 program completers were back in the workforce with a job retention rate of 88% one year after program completion. Success was demonstrated by the fact that 475 of the state's largest employers hired workers from these programs.

Conclusion

This digest identified three major enrollment trends presently affecting community colleges. The three types of students, dual-credit, reverse transfer, and job retraining are likely to continue to grow in the near future. Dual-credit is exploding across the nation. Initial national research by Andrews (2001) shows these programs to be very successful in providing a much-needed academic stimulus for junior and senior secondary school students. Reverse transfer provides for retraining for those students previously enrolled in or graduated from universities. Many enroll to develop new skills; others enroll to keep themselves up-to-date in their jobs. Job retraining should also continue to be a necessity with shifts in the American economy, shifting of jobs to the international market, and the need for businesses to keep up-to-date with technological changes in the workplace.

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